



Received: 10.11.2022

DOI: 10.15584/jetacomps.2022.3.9

Accepted for printing: 17.12.2022

Published: 22.12.2022

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Theoretical Aspects of Remote Learning in Grades I–III of the Primary School

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Abstract

Early childhood education is an essential stage in the life of every child. Thanks to participation in lessons and school life, the child not only gains knowledge and various skills, but also shapes his personality, establishes bonds, and learns how to function in a social group. At the beginning of March 2020, the current order, also in the field of education, was disrupted by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. By decision of the state authorities, schools and many other public facilities were closed. Education has changed its current form by moving completely on the virtual plane, which has never happened before. The extremely fast turn of events caused huge chaos in both the pedagogical environment and among parents and their children. This has become a contribution to the theoretical and research considerations of many people.

Keywords: education, distance, learning, help, early education, student

General statement of the problem

The broadly understood concept of education is an extremely complex subject matter because it includes not only providing students with didactic materials from various fields necessary to acquire knowledge and skills in specific areas, but also affects the personality of each individual, taking into account their cognitive abilities, interests, attitudes, values, and generally speaking all-round intellectual development (Kupisiewicz, 2002, p. 28).

Subject of research

The subject of the research was the theoretical aspects of remote learning in grades I–III of primary school. Due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic,

schools and many other public facilities have been closed by the decision of the state authorities. Education has changed its current form by completely moving to the virtual plane, which has never happened before. The extremely fast turn of events caused huge chaos both in the pedagogical environment and among parents and their children. This has become a contribution to the theoretical and research considerations of many people, including ours. In this study, we have presented an initial outline of the studied phenomenon, focusing our considerations on the school, teacher, and student.

Publication analysis

Education understood in this way is usually implemented through institutional education, and while it is possible to implement it in stationary conditions, i.e., within the institution, it is necessary to reflect on the situation when such conditions cannot be met. Remote education, distance learning, e-learning or other terms meaning basically the same, i.e., teaching away from the institution using computer techniques and the Internet, or also supporting teaching with the use of computers, multimedia techniques, and the Internet. A very detailed definition of this process was proposed by Kubiak (2000, p. 34) who wrote that “distance learning is a method of conducting the didactic process in conditions when teachers and students (students) are distant from each other (sometimes significantly) and are not in the same place, using to transmit information – in addition to traditional means of communication – also modern, very modern telecommunications technologies, sending: voice, video image, computer data, and printed materials. Modern technologies also enable direct contact in real time between the teacher and the student by means of audio or videoconferencing, regardless of the distance that separates them”. Until recently, this method of education was an additional element supporting the didactic process and was aimed at increasing its attractiveness for students or increasing their interest and motivation in relation to the content they are learning, or increasing their IT competences. Education ministers from countries of the European Union developed an educational strategy, the tool of which was to be distance education, and the implementation deadline was 2010, while the following goals were set:

- Improving the quality and efficiency of education systems in the EU;
- Widening access to the education system;
- Making education systems accessible to the wider community (Bednarek, 2008, p. 16).

Thus, it can be concluded that more than ten years ago the huge potential of distance learning was noticed. It is worth noting that it was supposed to be a tool to improve and broaden didactic horizons. There was no question of completely replacing the existing education with a remote form because there are diametrical differences between these types of education; for example, in terms of the

cognitive aspect, it is not difficult to see that in online education the role of the image received is increasing, while the position of handwriting, which is popular in the traditional model, in addition, providing ready-made images may somehow limit the recipient's imagination. In favor of distance education, however, there is the fact that the possibilities of supporting the memory process in all its phases are ensured. Distinctive features of distance education are:

- Maintaining the same objectives as in traditional education, but eliminating formal barriers to recruitment;
- Complementing the programs developed by the school;
- Using various information media and other possible methods of communication and transmission;
- Flexibility in the selection of methods, forms, and modes of education;
- Widely available selection of training materials;
- Adaptation to the individual needs and abilities of the student;
- Ability to contact the student with the teacher via the Internet, both in synchronous and asynchronous mode;
- Possibility of individualization of education;
- Time and place adapted to the needs and capabilities of both parties (Çeçelek, 210).

Over the years, distance learning has been developing, and the organization of didactic work has been carried out in various ways, thus taking the form of:

- Correspondence courses, which were based on training materials delivered by post;
- Teaching of correspondence based on specially prepared learning materials sent to students;
- Videoconferencing systems coupled with a computer network;
- Teaching via radio or television;
- Courses made available on the channels of the educational cable television network;
- Teaching via radio or television with additional telephone or other interaction (Bednarek, Lubina, 2008, p. 95).

Remote education used as an additional form to supplement traditional teaching has its advantages and disadvantages. Undoubtedly, they speak in their favour:

- High flexibility as to time, place, and pace of learning;
- Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of education;
- Improving IT skills;
- Attractive form of classes.

However, there is also the “other side of the coin”, because in addition to the positives, you can also see the negative aspects of distance education, which are undoubtedly:

- Lack of direct contact with the teacher and other students;
- Weakened emotional bonds with peers;
- Barriers related to lack of IT competence or technical problems.

Despite some of the above-mentioned inconveniences, many students willingly used the additional form of education that was distance learning to provide themselves with additional learning opportunities. This form seemed quite attractive as long as it was a voluntary choice of the student, did not limit his personal space, and did not disturb his current habits and basic development needs.

Presentation of the material

The beginning of 2020 brought with it difficult conditions for education and its participants. Due to the appearance and very rapid spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the Ministry of National Education decided to introduce distance learning in order to prevent the development of the pandemic, therefore, the relevant regulations were issued:

- amending the regulation on the temporary limitation of the functioning of educational system units in connection with the prevention, counteraction, and combating of COVID-191
- on special solutions during the period of temporary limitation of the functioning of education system units in connection with preventing, counteracting, and combating COVID-192 (www.dziennikustaw.gov.pl).

The solutions proposed therein were to allow the organization and course of education to be carried out using distance learning methods and techniques so didactic and educational tasks could be performed and the core curriculum implemented despite the limitations resulting from the specificity of distance learning.

In addition, the Ministry of National Education has also created a guide addressed to all participants in remote education, i.e. headmasters, teaching staff, parents, and students. Each of the above-mentioned sides of education received appropriate advice and materials to positively influence the effectiveness of the didactic process. Initially, the responsibility for children's education fell on the shoulders of parents. Teachers were only supposed to be the initiators of certain activities by proposing activities and exercises to parents or by sending worksheets. The guardians, on the other hand, had to introduce their children to the current situation, explain all the unknowns, create conditions, and, of course, implement remote education into their lives so far (MEN, 2022).

Due to this situation, the entire educational system at all levels required a complete reorganization. Looking at the structure of education, it is obvious that many participants take part in it, and each of them should be perceived from a completely different perspective, because they have different rights, obligations, and points of view. The basic members of remote education are, of course, the student and the teacher, but speaking of the early school stage, the partici-

pants of this process are also parents or legal guardians, who play a huge role in education, especially those in the online form. Each of the parties mentioned above had to reorganize their lives as a result of the situation. It was necessary to adjust one's own lifestyle related to both the personal and personal sphere. Education has also different methods and techniques, which have also had to change because those used so far have ceased to be useful. Both teachers had to adapt to working with new tools, and students needed time to adjust to receiving knowledge and learning in a completely different way than before.

From the point of view of all participants in education, the prospect of online learning was a huge shock. Teachers who had no contact with this form of teaching or knew little about it had to do a lot of work to implement, at least to a small extent, the methods and tools for remote education. According to the reports on this subject, it can be safely stated that no detailed guidelines on how to organize remote learning have been provided by the government, and no support has been provided. As a result, some of the teaching staff tried to train on their own by participating in online training and webinars; there was also a group of teachers who did not take up the challenge and stopped teaching when schools were closed and switched to remote mode. Such activities had an impact on the recipients, i.e., students, and therefore in the first case, education could continue, although perhaps in a slightly reduced form, but it still occurred, students did not lose the chance and opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills, and in the second case, the echo of teacher training resulted in tragic consequences, pupils were left to fend for themselves, disoriented, and deprived of the possibility of further education in this situation. This image shows how important the teacher is in remote education. Much depends on his willingness and motivation to improve himself and overcoming obstacles encountered in his development path. Interestingly, many educators who wanted to meet the needs caused by the pandemic set up Facebook groups in which they shared with other teachers their ideas for working with students under current conditions, advised each other what tools could be used to make lessons interesting and effective, and provided each other with mutual mental support, which was also essential in such a difficult time (Buchner, Wierzbicka, 2020).

Another party involved in education is, of course, students who have been placed in a very difficult and incomprehensible situation. many questions and unknowns were born in their heads, as well as a lot of fear and anxiety related to the presence of a pandemic. They demanded explanations from teachers and parents; they could not understand and accept the situation in which they found themselves. It is worth noting an important issue, not only the way of education has changed for them, but also their relationships between peers, which at the early school stage are an extremely important element of the development of an individual, have been severely limited. It was also very difficult to adapt to les-

sons at home; many students did not want to show their surroundings in front of the camera or had to share the space with their siblings. A big barrier was also IT competences, which at this age, for obvious reasons, were not yet developed and the help of household members was necessary here. All these aspects make the education process very stressful and difficult for students to manage. The children were faced with quite a challenge – they had to assume the role of a fairly independent participant in education, responsible, caring for their educational path.

Early childhood education is a special stage, because students are already obliged to acquire knowledge, but they are just learning this process and need a lot of support. In “normal” conditions, it is given by the teacher who tries to observe the student’s work on an ongoing basis and correct mistakes made; as a result of switching to remote mode, this task fell on the shoulders of parents and legal guardians, so it is worth mentioning how important they were in the process of remote education. Their tasks included not only reconciling professional life with remote teaching of their children. They had to organize a space at home adapted to learning, take care of the mental aspect of their charges, explain the situation to them, and, of course, help them get used to remote education. Often it was the parents, on their own, who first had to undergo training in the tools proposed by the school in order to be able to show their children how to use them (Plebańska, Szyller, Sieńczewska, 2020).

As you can see, all participants in remote education played essential roles and it would not have been possible without the participation of any of them. Everyone had to do a lot of work and adapt to existing conditions so that distance learning could function and bring about results. The cooperation of the above-mentioned parties is necessary for remote education to exist, despite their cooperation, there are still other barriers that need to be overcome so that students can learn from home; these include:

- access to technology,
- preparing teaching staff and students for virtual education;
- maintaining an appropriate level of communication and participation,
- student progress checks and exams (pie.net.pl, 2020).

Conclusion

For remote education to exist and bring effective achievement, three basic elements must be met:

- technical capabilities on both sides of the process, i.e., both the student and the teacher. These possibilities should be understood as access to equipment and the Internet, as well as remote education management software;
- educational resources;
- competences of teaching staff in the field of organizing education in a remote form (Pyżalski, 2020, p. 43).

Bearing in mind the above elements, the readiness of the current school and students for distance learning in each of the above-mentioned points should be considered, and if not, whether and what steps should be taken to achieve this readiness.

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